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Conditions in Construction Camps of The Florida East Coast Railway

Result of the Investigations of N. B. Claussen, Special Representative of the Philadelphia Inquirer, Who Recently Completed a Tour of the Different Centers of Work on Mr. Flagler's Gigantic Enterprise.

Upon receiving directions from the Philadelphia Inquirer to make a thorough investigation of conditions in the railroad camps of the Florida East Coast Railroad, I went to Miami. To fully understand the magnitude of the task one has put to look at a map of Florida. Extending from Cape Florida in a southwesterly curve of one hundred and fifty miles is a chain of islands, or keys, to Key West. The Florida East Coast Railroad Company is constructing an extension of the line starting at Homestead, 28 miles of Miami, to Key West, a distance of 150 miles. From Homestead the road bed is being constructed through swampy ground for about seventeen miles. Huge dredges, digging their own canal, dump the sand on an embankment, thus forming the roadbed.

From Key Largo the line is built on the keys and on concrete foundations to Key West. Between these two points there are twelve construction camps, occupied by about three thousand men. Seven hundred and fifty of these are negroes, and work in different parts of camps from the white men. The only communication with the camps at this time is by the supply boats which go to them to deliver provisions and water. They are cut off from civilization even more so than a mining camp in the Black Hills of Dakota fifty years ago.

Commissioner Glady Received.

On my arrival at Miami I called on Mr. J. C. Meredith, construction engineer of the work. When informed of my mission he expressed a willingness to help me in every way to make a thorough examination of all the camps and dredging outfits.

"We have been wishing that some reliable paper like the Philadelphia Inquirer would send a representative to investigate charges that have appeared from time to time in the northern papers about our mistreatment of the laborers on the work," said Mr. Meredith. "I want to give you a letter to every man in authority under me to assist you in your investigation. If you will permit me, I will place a special boat and crew at your command, with instructions to aid you in every way on your visit to the camps. We are doing this for the Inquirer because we wish that journal to publish the exact conditions."

I accepted Mr. Meredith's offer of the boat and letters, receiving the right to describe without fear or favor anything I might see on my trip. He gave orders for the boat to be made ready at once. While waiting I showed him copies of the Inquirer of March 11 and 12, containing stories given out by the men who had returned home.

After reading them he said: "Out of 5,500 men we started here from New York, Philadelphia and other cities, not over 3,000 reached us.

How Men Were Selected.

"At the booking offices in New York and Philadelphia we had one of our best men, Mr. E. J. Triay. He passed on every applicant, engaging only the best. The sick, weak and 'hobo' class which amounted to forty per cent. of the applicants were refused. Every man accepted was given a card stating the amount of wages he was to receive, what his board would cost if we fed him, and the amount of transportation, $12.00, which we advanced him to reach our line at Jacksonville. Mr. Triay also told the applicant the nature of the work. The applicant was also told that on our line he would be transported free to the camps; that the amount advanced would be taken out of his wages a little at a time so as not to make it a hardship at the start.

"If the applicant did not wish to eat in the mess tent he could board himself out of the commissary. A large percentage signed these contract cards and sold them to some of the undesirable forty per cent that we turned down. Men who were looking for anything but work and wanted a free ride into a warm climate for the winter. When they were aboard the train our Mr. Cotton, Mr. Triay's assistant, went through the cars and put off about ten per cent of these.

Twenty From Philadelphia.

"One train load of two hundred arrived at our dock here, where a steamer was in waiting to transport them to the camps. There were about twenty from Philadelphia in this party. The foreman in charge told them to go aboard. All but ten of the men, and they were from Philadelphia, refused. One hundred and ninety would not budge. He could not compel them to take the boat, so left with the ten, who are now at the camps.

"We had brought them down and they refused to go to the works. Few, if any, of them had more than the clothes each was wearing. The city authorities of Miami told those who stayed behind they would have to work or leave town. Many went to work for the water company. They had to be in trenches laying sewer pipes, much of the time standing in water, which made it much harder work than any we ask our men to do.

"On the Keys we employ negro labor to cut the right of way where the men build the grade. They have to clear the brush and work in water. You will not find a white man in our employ, outside of the anchor men on the dredges, who has to wet his feet. The anchor men are engaged for this work alone and get $35 a month and their board. Out of 159 miles of work only 17 miles is in swampy ground. This work is done by dredges that dig their own channel and pile the soil on the line of the grade. When the water is all out gangs of men level off the top for the track to rest on."

Off for the Camps.

As Mr. Meredith concluded one of his assistants announced that the boat was ready, so I left him. Upon arriving at the dock the cabin power boat Enterprise, with a crew of four men, awaited me. When I boarded her I requested the pilot to make Jew Fish Creek by night if possible. At that point two dredges with a crew of fifteen men each are at work. The line crosses from the mainland to Key Largo. We proceeded down Biscayne Bay through lines of yachts and fishing boats and passing the homes of many millionaires, who spend small fortunes here every year fishing for tarpon, Spanish mackerel and other game fish, so plentiful in these waters.

About sundown the wind freshened to half a gale, compelling us to seek shelter for the night under the lee of a key near Cuttle Fish Banks. Early next morning we entered Jew Fish Creek, which separates the main land and Key Largo, an island about thirty miles long. At the southern end the dredges Mikado and Prickley-heat are constructing the grade through swampy land.

Members of the crew of the Mikado confirmed what Mr. Meredith said in regard to working in water and mud. They had no complaint to make. They are paid $35 a month and part of the time are idle on account of the dredge being compelled to stop work for lack of fresh water for the boilers. Water has to be transported in 10,000 gallon tanks, from Miami. On occasions like this the men go fishing or loaf on the boat. Their wages are paid monthly, and no deduction is made for time lost through no fault of their own. The dredgemen, as a whole, receive better wages than the camp laborers.

On the lower end of Key Largo is camp No. 2, where only negro laborers are used. I did not stop there, as I was anxious to reach a camp of white men known as No. 8, which is situated on Windley's Island, sixty miles south of Miami. There I found thirty men from Philadelphia out of a total of one hundred and fifty-nine in the camp.

Camp No. 8 is the nearest white camp to Miami on the keys. I reached there at 11 o'clock and thus had an excellent opportunity to see and talk with all the men, as it was their dinner hour. Taken as a whole, they were a very hardy-looking lot of laborers. There was not one man on the sick list; in fact, the hospital tents were empty in every camp I visited, though there has been typhoid fever in several of the camps. These cases were removed at once to the hospital at Miami.

Sanitary rules are strictly enforced at all the camps. When the men had finished their dinner I asked those from Philadelphia to step forward. About thirty did so. I told these men of the reports given out by laborers returning home. I asked if any one of them was being detained against his will or had to work under armed guards.

Each man replied that he could leave any time he wished to and never saw one of the walking bosses or foreman carry a gun.

Martin Haley, who lives at Germantown avenue and Master street, Philadelphia, and drives a mule car from the quarry to the end of the grade, said: "The men that went back home did not come down here to work; they wanted to get out of the cold weather. There are thirty of us here now. We are being treated right and are going to stay on the job." He was corrobated by Thomas Galagher, who lives on Philip street.

When requested to pose for a picture for the Inquirer they lined up and sat on some overturned cars laughing and joking all the while. The whole spirit of the camp was anything but that of an oppressed body of men.

Some Bad Characters.

There are undoubtedly some bad characters in each of the camps. Where there is such a gathering of men from all quarters this appears perfectly natural. For this reason the paymaster and his assistant carry a revolver.

Leaving Camp No. 8 we proceeded to Camp No. 4, the location of which is ideal. On a sandy coral beach, the extreme southern point of Upper Matacombe Key with the stars and stripes floating from a high pole are a hundred and odd snow white tents. In the water over a hundred men were swimming when the resident engineer informed me the men were on strike. He had discharged Edward Cunningham of Philadelphia, a fireman, and they all knocked off. This was not an uncommon occurrence, he said, but seldom lasted over a day.

The statement of Albert Hook, of 116 Beach street, voices the sentiment of all the Philadelphia men here. Hook said, "You can just tell those young ones back in Philadelphia they had better stay at home if they expect to come down here and walk on lemons or pick oranges all day. Our work is better than the average and I have no kick coming. Those young ones go back to Miami, spend all they make on whiskey, get locked up and into no end of trouble."

I found every case of typhoid fever had been removed from Camp No. 4. This is due to the men shirking the sanitary regulations which the engineers make every effort to enforce, both for their own health and that of the men under them.

One of the Oldest Camps.

Camp No. 5, located on the west shore of Lower Matacombe Key, is one of the oldest camps. It was started last November. At No. 5 there are a number of men from Philadelphia. They have many complaints to make. The camp is infested with fleas and vermin. Some of the men showed me their bodies covered with marks. While they are within fifty feet of a good bathing beach the engineers cannot compel them to bathe, and their condition is a menace to those who do.

Walking Boss Richards is in charge of the men. A young fellow arrived at this camp and refused to go to work. Richards shipped him back to Miami free of charge after the man had tried to get up a strike and caused a disturbance. Jim Carroll, Joe Roundtree, both of Tacony and Mike Kenney, of 3263 North Twelfth street, work in the mess tent. They posed for a picture for The Inquirer. When asked if the men got enough to eat said: "Some of these men get more and better grub down here than they ever had around Philadelphia. The better class of men here try to keep clear of them. All the kicking comes from them; they are no good."

William Scott, of 2142 Carpenter street, leaves camp for home today. He denied that he has been mistreated. Some time ago Joe Carroll, of Philadelphia, was engaged in blasting. A dynamite cartridge exploded and injured him severely. He was removed to the hospital at Miami and is now back at work. He said the company has treated him squarely.

I received word that Mr. B. A. Walden, assistant general foreman of construction work, was at the next camp, so I boarded the boat. The run was made quickly and we reached No. 9, on Indian Key, after dark. The men were done work for the day.

There are about 220 men in this camp. Thirty odd hail from Philadelphia. When I told them the Philadelphia Inquirer had sent me to ascertain if any one of them was being forcibly detained, ill fed or abused by armed guards, they answered as a whole, saying they could leave at any time, but they did not think it just that the company should charge them $1.50 to go to Miami on one of their own boats. They added, since a foreman named Good had been discharged and Mr. J. G. Frost, the resident engineer, had taken charge they had been treated "white." The food, they said, was the principal thing they found fault with.

Never Saved Money.

The question of food supply I investigated in all the camps and found about the same conditions and supply everywhere. Some of the men coming here should never have come, as they were unfit for hard work. The majority of them had been in camp nine weeks and had only saved enough money to get back home. Gambling among themselves is one of the evils. While whiskey is rigidly kept out of the camps, boats from Miami and Key West land on the islands and keys at night and sell poor whiskey to the men, who pay as high as $5 a quart for it.

The pay roll showed $14 to be the average net amount received by each laborer monthly.

The transportation charge of $12.50 from Philadelphia is deducted gradually from the pay, so a man has to work over three months to cover the cost of transportation both ways if he intends to quit. Many in this lot only came down to get out of the cold weather, and find they can't get back without working one or two months more.

At this camp Andrew H. Miller, of 2127 Fourth street; William Kelley of 2515 Christian street; J. A. Murphy, of 2642 Catherine street; John Moore, of 4133 Tower street, all of Philadelphia, have worked ten weeks. They have paid back to the company their transportation money, $12.50, but not one of them has over $5 saved to return home on.

The statement that the mayor of Miami was the paymaster of the Florida East Coast Railroad, and that the sheriff was a relative of Mr. Flagler's, I found to be absolutely false. The mayor of Miami, John Sewall, a prominent merchant and member of the board of county commissioners, is a wealthy man and has no connection with the F. E. C. Railroad. The sheriff, Mr. Frohock, is no relative of Mr. Flagler, but says he would not object to being his brother.

None Forcibly Detained.

Through the whole investigation I have been unable to learn of one instance where a man is forcibly detained, worked under an armed guard, except in the case of Walking Boss Good of Camp 9, on Indian Key, who was discharged for going armed and threatening with a gun the men who would not work. The food supplied is about the average construction camp "grub." Plenty of it and clean. I found those doing the most kicking had never worked in a construction camp before. Laborers who worked on other roads say it's no better or worse than they got on other jobs. I was in Camp No. 8 on Windley's Island, when the men were at dinner. The meal consisted of a full plate of lima beans and pork, Irish potatoes, bread and coffee and apple sauce. Each man is helped as often as he desires. From one to three times a week fresh meat is served three times a day. This is when the supply boats arrive. At other meals sausage, tripe, cabbage, porridge, etc., is served. When a man is ill he is sent, free of charge to the hospital at Miami. If unfit for work when discharged from the hospital he is sent home by the company at their expense.

In the camps if a man is not sick and won't work, he gets nothing to eat without he has the money to pay for it, which is rare. If he quits and wishes to leave after a few weeks' work, he has to pay $1.50 to get to Miami on the company's boat. If he has no money and still persists in loafing, he is sent out of camp free. Upon his arrival at Miami he has to work, or the city authorities will take him up as a vagrant. He will have to work on the streets, or if he gets drunk and creates trouble, he finds himself in the chain gang, which is now working at Snake Creek, ten miles from Miami. This is where most of the armed guard talk comes from.

Troubles at Miami.

The authorities at Miami have their hands full every time the pay boat makes a trip to the camps. As soon as some of the men receive their month's pay they take the first boat for Miami. Liquor is not allowed in the camp, and many a thirst of a month's duration is quenched in the one night. Out of forty men arrested one night thirty-nine pleaded guilty, and as they had spent all of their money and could not pay the fine, they were put to work on the streets and water works.

Hospital for Free Treatment.

At Miami the Florida East Coast Railroad Company has a hospital where all the men engaged on the construction work receive free treatment in case of sickness. Dr. J. M. Jackson, Jr., a prominent physician of Miami, is in charge. Dr. J. A. Heitlinger, the house surgeon, makes frequent visits to all camps, treating minor cases. When he finds a case that requires hospital treatment the man is at once removed by boat to Miami. From the time the laborer leaves camp until he is discharged from the hospital cured the entire expense is borne by the company. I made a complete tour of the hospital and talked to each of the thirty-two inmates, among them John Cullen, of 507 South Terney street. He was removed from Camp 82 last January with rheumatism. He will be discharged, cured, this week. He told me he had no complaint to make and was going back to work at Camp 82 as soon as the doctor would let him. He said he had never seen a man ill-treated or any of the walking bosses carry a gun. Dr. Jackson said that a number of men were treated at the hospital and sent back home who had never done a day's work on the railroad. Some were taken off the train at Miami sick and should not have left the north. One is still in the hospital. He has heart disease. He was removed from the train on his arrival last December to the hospital. Everything has been done to save his life, but his case is hopeless.

On the keys from Miami to Key West are more representatives of two extremes than will be found in any out of the way part of the country. The millionaires sail in and out of the keys in quest of the game tarpon while on shore the laborer works out the transportation the railroad company furnished him from the north. A prominent engineer at Miami who has visited both Panama and Florida camps in the past month declares that the camps on the keys compared with Panama are a paradise. The temperature all the winter ranged from 56 degrees to 85 degrees on the keys.

Story of the Earth's Most Interesting Meteorites

THE recent acquisition of the famous Willamette meteorite by the New York Museum of Natural History adds greatly to that institution's pre-eminence as a collector of these ponderous natural wonders. It was already in possession of the great Peary find, the largest meteoric mass ever known to mankind, and this latest addition makes the museum the owner of two of the three largest meteorites in the world, the third being in Mexico. The scientific value of these curiosities is beyond compute. The intrinsic value is, of course, a matter of speculation, but some notion of its reality may be obtained from the fact that the museum authorities paid $20,600 for the Willamette meteorite, a transaction made possible by the generosity of Mrs. William E. Dodge of New York.

This Willamette meteorite has made a good deal of stir in the world. It was found in 1902 by a prospector named Hughes, who was one day puttering aimlessly in a forest near the little Oregon village of Willamette and chanced to strike his hammer against an unfamiliar object just below the surface. He jumped to the conclusion at once that he had discovered a bed of ore and proceeded to dig around it. When he had excavated far enough to see that it was a detached mass, he made up his mind that he would remove it to his own premises, about thirty miles distant.

So he filled in his excavation, carefully destroying all evidence of recent digging with a coating of forest litter. Then he returned home, confided his secret to his young son and announced his intention of securing the treasure. The boy entered enthusiastically into the scheme and promised to help all he could. A night or two later the pair set out in an ordinary farm wagon drawn by a team of undersized mules. How they finally accomplished their undertaking—a man and a boy and an ordinary pair of farm mules—is still a mystery. How they uncovered this twenty ton mass and loaded it on a common wagon and transported it thirty miles without discovery is a puzzle that smacks of unreality, but it seems to have been done. They were more than a week in making the return journey, moving only by night to avoid detection.

All their effort to keep the business secret proved futile. It leaked out presently, and the Portland Land company, which owned the forest in which the discovery was made, promptly demanded a restoration of the treasure. Hughes declined to yield possession of the meteorite and the matter went into court. The company had no difficulty in proving that the great mystery had been taken from its property. Hughes set up the contention that the meteorite did not properly belong to the land on which it was found, not being a part of it and having fallen upon it at some period subsequent to the creation of the earth. It was a knotty point, and the lawyers found abundant meat in it to advance some novel and startling theories, some of them more theological than legal. Finally the court appointed a receiver, who took charge of the curiosity until its proper status could be defined, and there was a lull in the proceedings.

During this period of legal inaction the chief of the mineral division of the geological survey borrowed the meteorite and put it on exhibition at the Clark and Lewis exposition at Portland, Ore. It speedily became a center of interest for scientists, and all the great museums in the world began to scheme to get possession of it. The only thing that operated against one of the most active professional competitions ever known to the scientific world was the uncertainty connected with the ownership of the great mass. There was absolutely no opportunity to make an actual beginning looking toward ultimate proprietorship.

At last, however, after the representatives of the curators of foreign museums had become disgusted with the legal tangle and had withdrawn from the race, the matter was settled amicably and the wonder came into the market with an unclouded title. The friends of the Museum of Natural History were on the ground and were alert. Thus it was that Americans were spared the humiliation of seeing this strange aerial visitant to the western world taken overseas.

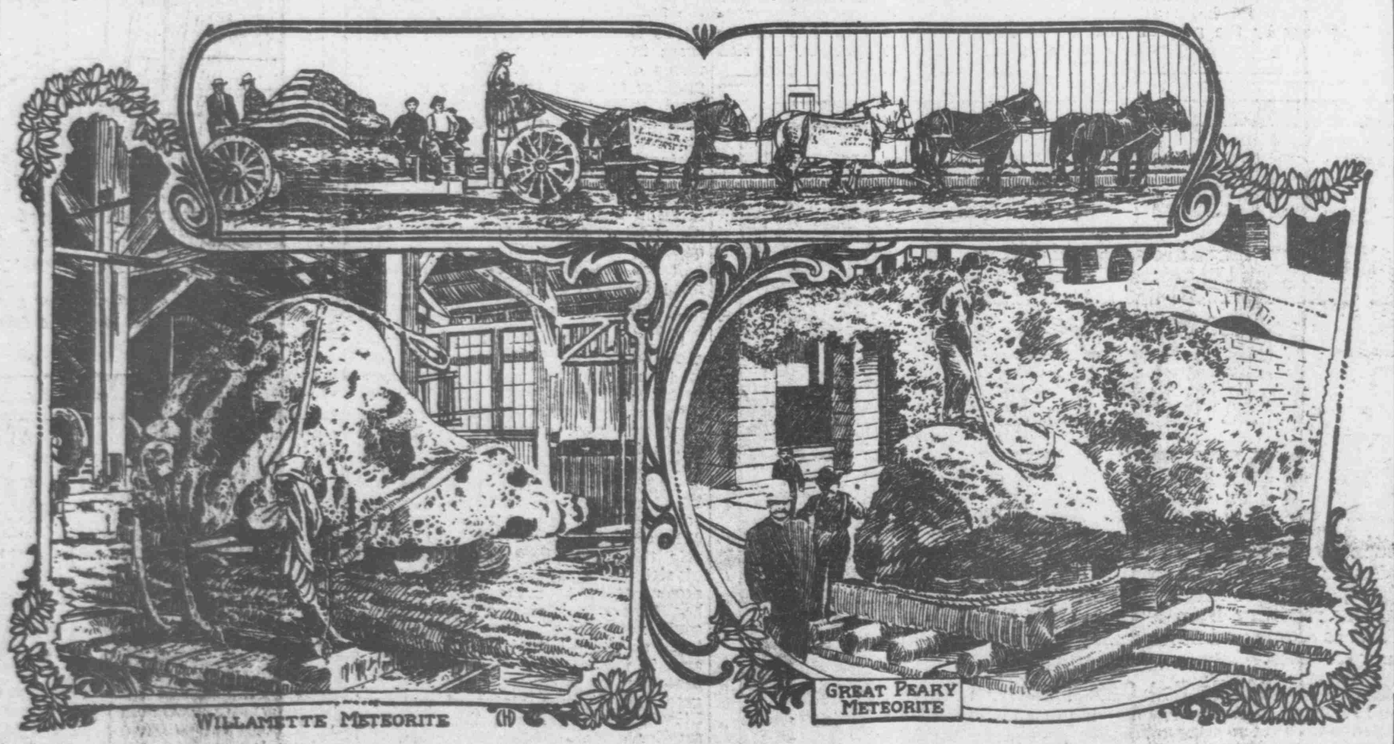
The other meteoric treasure of the museum, the Peary find, is the largest specimen ever discovered. It is about forty tons in weight and was brought from the coast of Greenland by the Hope, Peary's arctic exploring vessel. One night about ten years ago, while spending a few days at a small Eskimo settlement at Whale sound, Peary saw a small native knife which attracted his attention. The edge was composed of five small pieces of iron. It was the only one in the tribe, and Peary had seen nothing to indicate the presence of metal in the vicinity. He made inquiries, but the old men shook their heads; not one of them knew aught save that it was very old and had come from the "iron mountain," which they could not or would not locate.

The explorer resolved to make a search for the mountain. After many weeks, on the northern shore of that desolate body of water known as Melville bay, Peary came upon three meteorites. They were known to the few Eskimos of the region as the Woman, the Dog and the Tent. The Woman and the Dog were brought to the United States in 1895. Peary loaded them by means of hydraulic jacks and started southward. On the cruise home the presence of the masses of iron affected the ship's compass to such a degree that in bad weather the sailors could not keep to their course, but had to depend on dead reckoning. These smaller meteorites were landed safely and are now in the New York museum with their larger companion. The Woman has a weight of six tons and the Dog only one.

But Peary was not satisfied until he had made an attempt to transfer the gigantic Tent to home soil. He was not satisfied even then, for his first attempt resulted in failure to tear the monster from its icy bed of centuries. He returned to the task with largely increased facilities and finally succeed in moving the mass inch by inch with his powerful hydraulic lifting apparatus and loading it on the deck of the Hope. When it touched the deck the Eskimos who had helped to lead it bolted for the shore in great haste, believing that it would sink the ship. The stanch craft careened visibly, but soon righted herself and the homeward voyage was begun. It was the most laborious voyage Peary ever made. The ship had to cut her way through icebergs, and the storms were so violent that it sometimes seemed probable that the Tent would get loose and crash through the ship's sides. Every man on board, not excepting the intrepid commander, was relieved when the unwieldy cargo was landed at the Brooklyn navy yard. There it remained until it was taken to the museum on a specially constructed truck drawn by thirty-five Percheron horses.

So far as known, these three were the only meteorites in Greenland. They are also the only ones ever found so far north. They seem to be a combination of iron and nickel, with some carbon, and are the most metallic of all meteorites, unless the scientific explorations now progressing in Arizona shall uncover something even more wonderful. Shafts are now being sunk in that American wonderland with the intention of getting at the secret of Meteorite mountain, whose great crater is believed by scientists to have been excavated by the mighty impact of the largest meteor that ever plunged into the bosom of the earth.

HERBERT E. LOVEJOY.



POCKET STATES.

The smallest principality in the world is Monaco. It has an army of 126, and there is no conscription and no taxes. The whole available ground is built over, so there is no cultivation. The principality includes Monte Carlo, the gambler's paradise. It is on account of the immense sums left behind by visitors to the casino that Monaco is not harassed by taxation.

Prince Albert I. has not a very responsible position as ruler over six square miles. He is devoted to science and is well known among scientific men for his researches in marine biology. He derives an immense income from the gaming house and the results largely benefit his people. His heir, Louis, is his son by his first wife, Lady Mary Douglas-Hamilton.

The empire of Germany contains a large number of "pocket" states under 500 square miles in extent. One notable example is that of Lippe, which has lately sprung into fame owing to the succession dispute. Prince George of Schaumburg-Lippe and Prince Leopold of Lippe-Biesterfeld both claimed the vacant throne. Though Prince George had all the weight of the kaiser's influence to support him, Prince Leopold has won his case. His new subjects are delighted, for they bitterly resented the kaiser's interference.